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letters

LNG: not so volatile

Reviewer Denis Hayes may be an expert in solar energy, but his review of "Frozen Fire" (Book Review, Aug. 12) clearly demonstrates neither he nor the book's author are experts when it comes to liquefied natural gas (LNG).

"Frozen Fire" contains a great deal of misinformation about LNG which should be clarified for your readers:

While LNG can burn, it cannot explode. This conclusion was drawn by the US Coast Guard after extensive testing. Results of testing further confirmed that in its liquid form, LNG is a much less volatile energy form than oil or gasoline, fuels which we all use daily.

We would be the first to agree with the author that LNG, and the natural gas from which it comes, must be treated with respect. But worldwide experience over the past 20 years proves that when proper precautions are taken, LNG can be handled safely as an energy source. Some 3,300 oceanic shipments of LNG have been made over this period.

Readers of this book are being misled when the author compares a Cleveland LNG facility built in the early 1940s with the proposed LNG terminal at Little Cojo Bay, a remote site along the coastline in Santa Barbara County.

The storage tanks in Cleveland were built with materials not acceptable under today's stringent design standards that are based on space-age technology. With today's technology and standards, the Cleveland tanks would not have failed. Further, had there been a secondary containment feature now used around modern LNG tanks, the consequences of a tank failure would have been minimal.

As the LNG project here nears final federal approval, we can assure that every effort has been made to provide California with a safe, viable energy project, and one that is vitally needed in the 1980s.

W.B. WOOD
Vice President
Southern California Gas Co.

Differing doctrines

In his review of Stanley Elkin's "The Living End" (Book Review, July 15), Don Strachan gives us the definite impression that the book is not worth reading because of its phrase mongering. He gives us a vague impression that Elkin is anti-religious, but leaves us confused on this point.

For instance, Elkin is quoted as calling the Immaculate Conception a "smide oxymoron." If Elkin really said that, then we are left with the impression that he believes that every human is stained with Original Sin and that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was no exception. How else could the teaching of the Catholic Church concerning the Immaculate Conception be termed an oxymoron?

Could it be that both author and reviewer are confused as to Catholic doctrine? Perhaps Elkin has confused the Immaculate Conception with the Virgin Birth, the latter doctrine proclaiming that Mary conceived Jesus and gave birth through the divine intervention of the Holy Spirit, and not through the usual method. Perhaps Strachan was not clear himself on the difference between these two doctrines.

WALT KEVILLE
San Diego

Agee: a touch of sadness

Regarding the West View on James Agee (Book Review, July 1):

The first time I met James Agee
was in Beverly Hills . . .
I like the way he talked.
He was so gentle he spoke in
whispers for fear of disturbing
the serenity; the words rich,
poetic, like a beautiful symphony.
He was a strong handsome man with
a touch of sadness.
We had long stretches of road in
silence; a comfortable silence,
but you could feel the sadness.
He was a man of the soil, his
heart wrung by the condition of
the poor in small farms and
villages.
One day he called long distance
from a phone booth in the south.
Was not feeling well.
Then he died, and left a thorn
in our heart . . .

GILBERT ROLAND
Beverly Hills

San Diego authors

It saddens me to see you published such sloppy homework as that exhibited by Karl Keller. If he had done a little more research on San Diego writers, he might have noted that Ambrose Bierce was hired to promote a real estate subdivision there. Also that Francis Grierson was the author of a great novel about pre-civil war and mid-west American life, highly praised by Edmund Wilson, entitled "The Valley of the Shadows."

He might also have found that Robert Nathan resided in La Jolla for quite a few years. And finally, I wonder why he neglects to mention a more typical San Diego writer, Max Miller, who covered the waterfront there for many years and left several very good books about it.

JAKE ZEITLIN
Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES TIMES
THE BOOK REVIEW

ART SEIDENBAUM
Book Editor

ROBERT KIRSCH
Literary Critic

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book notes

ABC's of Aunt Bombeck coping

by DICK LOCHTE

Erma Bombeck

The Erma Bombeck boom that began a few years ago with "The Grass Is Always Greener Over the Septic Tank" shows no sign of subsiding. Her current "If Life Is a Bowl of Cherries—What Am I Doing in the Pits?" is a swiftly selling paperback that cost Fawcett $1 million for reprint rights. Evidently, that was a bargain because her next, "Aunt Erma's Cope Book—How to Get from Monday to Friday in 12 Days" (McGraw-Hill; $8.95; October), found the Fawcett ante raised to $1.9 million plus. "Cope Book" addresses itself to the self-help tomes of the '70s as well as to our preoccupations with TM, est and other systems for feeling better in bad times. In the course of her comedy coping ("Sensual Bowling," "How to Become a Sub-Total Woman" are two topics), Bombeck once again assumes her role as an angry, if not quite mad, housewife, struggling with husband, home, children and calories. One wonders how long she will be able to maintain this homemaker-next-door image now that her TV appearances (on ABC's "Good Morning, America"), columns and books have carried her into the millionairess category. Of course, the nice thing about money is that it allows you the freedom to be anything you want. Except poor.

★

EVENTS—Today, 3:30 p.m., Shisei Tsuneishi will read in Japanese at the Original Language Poetry Series at the Fifth Street Studio Theater (4157 W. 5th) . . . Today, 4:30 p.m., Barbara Abercrombie ("Good Riddance") and poets Jeanne Nichols and Norma Almquist will read at the Hermosa Community Center (Room 7). Info, call 379-9265 . . . Today, 4:30 p.m., Arthur Pfister ("Shadow and Song") and metaphysical poet Eiko Michi will read at George Sand (9011 Melrose) . . . Tuesday, 7 p.m., poets Austin Straus and Susan Chacin will be at the Old Venice Jail Readings (685 Venice Blvd., Venice) . . . Friday, 8 p.m., Carol Graham ("Chameleon") will read at Laguna Poets (428 Park, Laguna) . . . Friday, 8 p.m., poet Jerome Rothenberg will be featured at Beyond Baroque (681 Venice Blvd., Venice) . . . Saturday, 2 p.m., authors David Gerrold and Diane Duane will be guests of the Science Fiction, Fantasy & Fact Club at Stars 'n Stuff Books (1148 Highland Ave., Manhattan Beach). Sunday, 2 a.m., journalist R. Meltzer begins a new radio show, "Hepcats From Hell!," KPFK.

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SCHOOL'S IN—Saturday Sept. 15 marks the start of a 15-week Writers Conference at USC, offering seminars, short courses and special programs. For details, contact the USC Professional Writing Program, 741-8255 . . . Tuesday, Sept. 18, Rebecca Newman begins a class for writers, "Leisurely Reading for Pleasure," at UCLA Extension, Royce Hall. Info/registration, call 825-9971 . . . Wednesday, Sept. 19, publisher David Obst begins a course in "Contemporary Political Nonfiction" at USC's Evening College. Guest lecturers include John Dean, Seymour Hersh, Daniel Ellsberg and David Halberstam . . . Friday, Sept. 21, Cabrillo College Suspense Writers' Conference begins its weekend of conferences, lectures and chats featuring Tony Hillerman, Roger L. Simon, Bill Pronzini, Collin Wilcox and others. Call Cabrillo College, (408) 425-6331 . . . USC's Professional Writing Program will offer Jim Joseph's "How to Write, Edit, Publish—and Profit From—Newsletters," beginning Saturday, Sept. 22, Sam Thomas' 10-week "Fiction Fundamentals" beginning Oct. 1 and on Saturday, Sept. 22, Terry Galanoy ("Tonight") will begin a nonfiction book writing course at USC's Idyllwild Campus. Details on all are available from the registrar . . . Beyond Baroque Foundation has announced its Fall Writers Workshop Series. The poetry workshop meets Wednesdays, 8 p.m. Intensive poetry-writing workshop, led by Jack Grapes (whose latest collection is "Breaking on Camera"), begins 8 p.m., Monday, Oct. 1 and will continue for eight weeks. Michael Silverblatt teaches a fiction workshop, Susan Baskin a screenwriting workshop. Leland Hickman chairs a seminar on extended poetry form, while Kate Braverman teaches "Craft of Writing." Information, call/write Beyond Baroque, 681 Venice Blvd., Venice 90291, 822-3006 . . . Wednesday, Oct. 3, 8 p.m., Marcia Spiegel begins a six-session course, "The Jewish Woman: Her Feelings and Her Life Through Her Poetry," at University of Judaism (15600 Mulholland Drive). Call 879-4114.

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FINALLY—I was pleased to see this state is well represented in "The Contest Book," written by three New West contributors, Susan Subtle, Ruth Reichl and Ken Dollar (Harmony; $7.95, paperback). Among the approximately 300 nationwide contests described, we find Alameda's Motorized Bar Stool Races, Borrego Springs' Pegleg Liars Contest, Clear Lake's Worm Races, Coalinga's Joaquin Murietta Horned Toad Derby, Crescent City's Crab Races, Del Mar's Cow Chip Throwing Contest, Indio's Camel & Ostrich Race, Kenwood's World Championship Pillowfighting Contest, Petaluma's Ugly Dog Contest and Sonoma's Grape Stomp, to name but a few. Compared to this vast assortment, New York State offers only a scant list of attractions, including the Greenwich Village Poet Laureate Contest (Dullsville), a Hot Dog Eating Contest (very imaginative), Bolton Landings' Bed Race, New Platz's Duck Calling Championship and something titled the Amazing Micro-Mouse Maze Contest. Once again, the West is the best. Coming up this month: Don't miss the Hog Calling Contest in Pomona.

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